



# MEDIA RELEASE

STATE OF TENNESSEE  
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

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## **PARTNERSHIP AN OPPORTUNITY FOR TENNESSEANS WITH DISABILITIES** *DHS AND VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER CREATE JOB OPPORTUNITIES*

NASHVILLE, Tenn.— The Tennessee Department of Human Services and Vanderbilt University Medical Center are joining forces to help high school students with disabilities find full-time employment. "Project Opportunity" is a pilot career training and employment program within the Department's Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) for students in their last year of high school. After successful completion of the program, the students will be eligible for full-time employment at Vanderbilt Children's Hospital. The pilot program will begin assisting students in the Transition School to Work Program from the Williamson County School district this fall.

"Project Opportunity is a wonderful example of state government working with partners in the private sector for mutual gain," said DHS Commissioner Gina Lodge. "This program will benefit our clients, the hospital and the community."

The pilot program is modeled on a similar program at the Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center. Project Opportunity is targeted to students whose main goal is competitive employment. About a dozen students will take part in the program over the next school year, which requires total immersion and on-the-job-training in the healthcare setting.

"We have no doubt that this will be a successful program," said Terrell Smith, Director of Patient / Family Centered Care for Vanderbilt University Hospital and the Clinics. "We will start small and gradually build it up. Project Opportunity will make a difference in many lives."

In addition to the Williamson County School System, other Project Opportunity partners include Community Options, a community rehabilitation program, the Tennessee Division of Mental Retardation Services and the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities.

The Department's DRS has cooperative agreements with 46 school districts across the state, including Williamson, Robertson and Cheatham Counties in Middle Tennessee. These agreements are part of the Transition School to Work program, which provide a continuum of services to students with disabilities enrolled in public schools. The objective of the Transition School to Work Program is to develop joint educational, training and vocational plans and goals for students with disabilities in order to bridge the gaps between the formal educational program and the world of work.

For more information on the Department of Human Services' Division of Rehabilitation Services, visit [www.state.tn.us/humanserv/rehabilitation.htm](http://www.state.tn.us/humanserv/rehabilitation.htm)

For more information on Vanderbilt Children's Hospital, visit [www.vanderbiltchildrens.com](http://www.vanderbiltchildrens.com)

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